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ABSTRACT

The Pennsylvania Summer Youth Service Corps (SYSC) is an effort to assimilate the ideals of community service exemplified by the Peace Corps, VISTA, and the Civilian Conservation Corps with the long-established Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP). SYSC differs from the existing summer youth employment program by its focus and orientation on service contributions to one's community, state, and nation, not simply on earning money in a summer job; teams of young people working with a full-time crew leader; work assignments that are visible projects providing lasting benefits to the community; and learning goals that are focused on self-development, increased competence, and improved self-esteem. Designated service delivery areas under the auspices of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) administer SYSC. Once selected, corpsmembers participate in a "wilderness challenge" experience designed to develop leadership, self-confidence, trust, and teamwork. The following week, work crews begin their assigned work project; educational services are integrated into the daily activities of each work crew. A task force formed to explore ways to improve the SYETP has conducted workshops to provide information on SYSC and to train corps crew leaders. SYSC uses existing federal, state, and local resources for its support; the majority of funds comes from JTPA. Pennsylvania plans to expand SYSC in 1990. (YLB)

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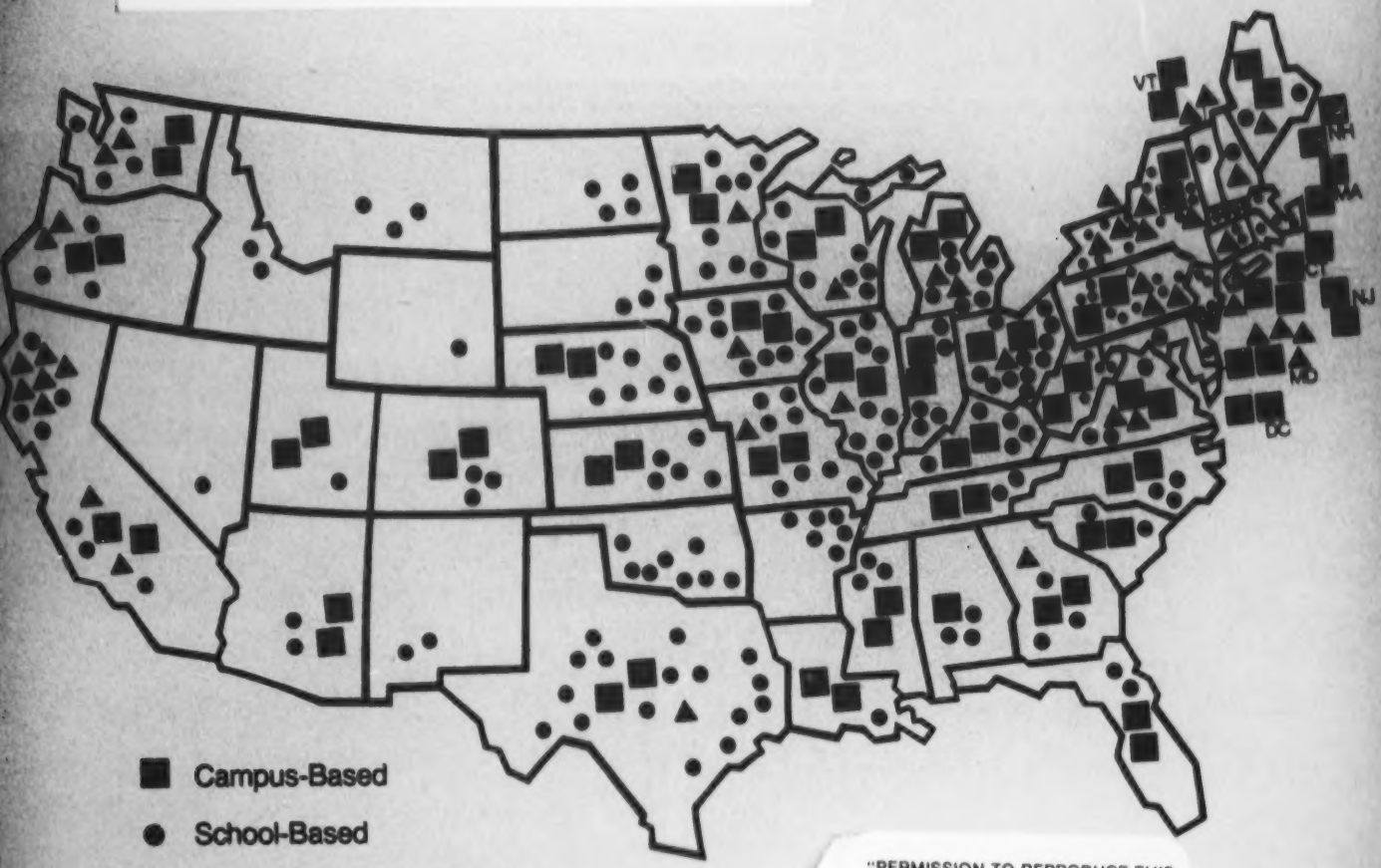

■ Campus-Based

● School-Based

▲ Service & Conservation Corps

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A Summer Youth Service Corps for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

A Concept Paper by
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Editor's Note: *Since November, 1986 when Governor Robert Casey was elected Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been known as the "service state." In less than two years, Pennsylvania has demonstrated how a state can encourage youth service with leadership from the top.*

The mandate from Governor Casey, Secretary of Labor and Industry Harris Wofford and Secretary of Education Thomas Gilhool is to rebuild the civic infrastructure by giving young people of all ages new opportunities to serve.

The state agency leading this effort is PennSERVE, headed by John Briscoe, who gives the Governor's initiative tangible shape. This concept paper shows how a creative use of Job Training Partnership Act funds can result in expanded summer service opportunities for young people.

A Concept Paper by
John A. Briscoe, Director,
PennSERVE and
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A Summer Youth Service Corps for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Overview

The Pennsylvania Summer Youth Service Corps is an effort to assimilate the ideals of community service exemplified by the Peace Corps, VISTA and the Civilian Conservation Corps with the long established Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP). The goal of this initiative is to reshape the existing SYETP into a service corps on the model of the New York's City Volunteer Corps, the Pennsylvania Conservation Corps and the California Conservation Corps.

The Summer Youth Service Corps differs from the existing summer youth employment program in the following ways:

- its focus and orientation is on service contributions to one's community, state, and nation, not simply on earning money in a summer job
- young people work in teams with a full-time crew leader
- work assignments are visible projects that provide lasting benefits to the community and instill a sense of pride in those who participate in their completion (this is in place of traditional summer youth work assignments such as school or park maintenance)
- learning goals are focused on self-development, increased competence, and improved self-esteem [these are complementary to the existing summer youth program's goals of enhancing basic educational skills, encouraging school completion, and exposing young people to the world of work].

Corpsmembers will generally be disadvantaged youth, but not exclusively. Non-disadvantaged youth will be encouraged to participate to the extent that state, corporate and philanthropic funding will permit. Designated service delivery areas under the auspices of the Job Training Partnership Act have agreed to administer the Summer Youth Service Corps.

Approach

The Department of Labor and Industry in partnership with PennSERVE, The Governor's Office of Citizen Service, the Pennsylvania Service Delivery Area Association, the Departments of Environmental Resources and Community Affairs and a number of community-based organizations throughout the state developed these program models in order to build upon and enrich the Commonwealth's existing SYETP.

The Commonwealth's SYETP has undergone significant changes in recent years, most notably a reduction each year in new funds allotted to the Commonwealth by the U.S. Department of Labor. Pennsylvania will

receive $26.8 million in new funds for the 1989 summer program, down from $42.8 million in 1985. Along with unspent funds from the 1988 summer program, the Commonwealth will have a total of $31.5 million available for the 1989 summer program.

Despite decreasing resources, many program administrators have difficulty filling available job slots because of the widespread availability of entry-level employment in retail stores and restaurants. While financially rewarding, these jobs offer little skills development or training to youth, and they do little to enhance long-term prospects for employment. A number of research studies have demonstrated that summer work experience alone does little to improve future employment opportunities and earnings.

While recent amendments to the Job Training Partnership Act have helped place greater emphasis on education, the SYETP generally lacks a unified strategy or mission. With a declining youth population that is composed of a much larger percentage of the disadvantaged and undereducated, the summer youth program is in an excellent position to provide meaningful interventions in the lives of these young people.

As a result of the recommendations by the Economic Development Partnership Task Force on Education and Job Training to expand summer youth programs to ameliorate the transition of students from school to work, the Commonwealth has already begun to implement related programs such a the Summer Training and Education Program (STEP), Job Teams, Jobs for Pennsylvania's Graduates, School Community Service Programs, and Urban Youth Service Corps.

The Summer Youth Service Corps complements these efforts with the recognition that community service imparts a great sense of personal worth, builds self-respect, strengthens attachments to family and community and creates useful products of which young people and the community can be proud. If, as John Dewey suggested, we learn best by doing, community service offers a host of opportunities for experiential learning.

The essential ingredients of the corps are those of SYETP. These include serving disadvantaged youth age 12 to 21 and working at worksites for public and non-profit agencies for six to eight weeks—all during the summer months (June-August).

In addition, the Summer Youth Service Corps will enhance the existing summer programs by broadening the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of those who participate. It will successfully address this issue by expanding participant eligibility to encompass a number of non-disadvantaged youth. The cost of extending eligibility to these individuals will be supported with state, corporate, and foundation funds.

A Full-Scale Youth Service Corps

Once selected, corpsmembers participate in a "wilderness challenge" experience designed to develop leadership, self-confidence, trust, and teamwork. Corpsmembers participate along with their team leader and the other members of their summer work crew. Crews should consist of eight to twelve corpsmembers supervised by a paid crew leader. Crews should reflect the race, sex, and ethnic diversity of the community. Crew leaders play the key role as leaders, supervisors, teachers and mentors for corpsmembers.

The orientation/wilderness challenge should average four and one-half days in length and should be interspersed with outdoor challenges such as hiking, rock climbing, camping, high/low ropes course, etc.. This component should also include other development activities such as discussions on the meaning and obligations of citizenship and community service, orientation and planning for the summer's work project(s), and first aid training.

The following week, work crews should begin their assigned work project. These projects should be tangible, necessary and of long-lasting benefit. Work may consist of largely physical activities, such as improvements to parks, playgrounds and other public facilities, or may include social services, such as providing services to the aged or mentally or physically disabled.

Inter-generational experiences, such as tutoring grade school students or providing services to the elderly, can have tremendous rewards. Work must be well planned and supervised to ensure that good attitudes and realistic expectations of the world of work are provided.

Another necessary facet of the corps concept is the integration of educational services into the daily activities of each work crew. Corpsmembers who require remediation in reading, communication skills or math should be provided such training to stem the loss of such academic instruction during the summer months and to improve long term employability.

Corpsmembers not requiring remediation should also be provided educational services. Examples of such service include: basic skills training to augment existing skills of corpsmembers who would benefit from enhanced basic skills; GED preparation for those who are out of school but lack a diploma; and, where practical, advanced level training for those who may benefit. In addition, all corpsmembers should be provided with work readiness training including career exploration, labor market and occupational information, pre-employment and work maturity skills training, and orientation to citizenship.

Corpsmembers should also be required to maintain a daily journal of their experiences, to be reviewed and discussed periodically both with the crew leader and fellow corpsmembers.

Current Status

In August 1988, a task force was formed to explore ways to improve the SYETP. Task force members represented the Department of Labor and Industry, PennSERVE, the Pennsylvania Service Delivery Area Association, and the State Job Training Coordinating Council. Membership later expanded to include representatives of the Departments of Community Affairs and Environmental Resources.

The task force met throughout the fall to explore various program options. A number of task force members visited California to observe the East Bay Conservation Corps, San Francisco Conservation Corps, and the Los Angeles Summer Corps. The task force then visited STEP, Inc. in Williamsport to review that agency's "Wilderness Challenge" program. Task force members representing the Pennsylvania Service Delivery Area Association presented the Summer Service Corps concept to the the

Association, where a majority of service delivery area administrators were positive about the concept.

The task force issued a request-for-proposals in January 1989, and selected three agencies to provide the "wilderness challenge" component of the full-corps model. The three agencies are: STEP, Inc. located in Williamsport; Tressler Lutheran Services in Mechanicsburg; and the Linsley Outdoor Center at Racoon Creek State Park in Beaver County. Each participating service delivery area will work with its chosen agency to arrange for corpsmembers to participate in the wilderness challenge experience. The Department of Environmental Resources is also working to send fifty members of the Pennsylvania Conservation Corps through the wilderness challenge.

The task force also conducted a conference call "workshop" on March 20. Twenty-two of twenty-eight service delivery areas participated, as did ten of eleven Department of Community Affairs summer youth program contractors. Conference call participants were provided a briefing on the summer corps concept with in-depth discussions on community service, integration of non-JTPA eligible youth into the program, the goals of the wilderness challenge component and the three agencies selected to provide services, marketing issues, and planning for future workshops/training for crew leaders.

The Department of Labor and Industry issued the summer youth program planning guidelines, summer service corps fact sheets, the summer service corps concept paper, and a grant application for PennSERVE funds to the service delivery areas in March 1989. The plans, fact sheets, and grant request were received by the Department on April 10, 1989.

The task force will conduct a Summer Youth Service Corps workshop in May. The task force is also planning to conduct a two day training workshop in Philadelphia during June for summer corps crew leaders. A marketing committee of the task force will develop marketing materials for the summer corps — a logo, tee-shirts, baseball caps and brochures to assist each service delivery area in developing an identity for its corps.

Based on the survey of service delivery areas conducted during the week of April 3, 1989, twenty service delivery areas are planning to operate summer corps programs. Over twenty-five full-scale youth corps crews will enroll over 250 young people. Another 100 youth will serve in modified versions of the full-scale corps. Service delivery areas planning to participate include: Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Beaver County, Tri-County, Fayette-Westmorland, Six-County, Southern Alleghenies, Mid-State, Northern Tier, Philadelphia, Bucks County Montgomery County, Delaware County, Chester County, Lehigh Valley, Berks County, SETCO, Lancaster County, Franklin-Adams, and West Central.

Cost

The Summer Youth Service Corps utilizes existing federal, state and local resources for its support. The majority of funds comes from the federal Job Training Partnership Act provided by service delivery areas. These funds provide corpsmembers' wages, crew leader wages, transportation costs, education and training costs, uniforms and the cost of the "wilderness challenge" experience.

PennSERVE is providing $75,000 in state money, hoping to leverage matching funds from corporate and foundation sponsors. The intention is to provide those who do not qualify as disadvantaged an opportunity to participate in the program.

The Department of Community Affairs, through Community Services Block Grant funds, currently operates ten summer youth programs around the state. Seven of the community-based organizations that administer these programs have expressed a desire to join with the local service delivery area to create summer corps programs.

Through its Bureau of State Parks and Forests, the Department of Community Affairs has committed some of its maintenance fund to the provision of materials, tools, equipment, and in some cases paid supervision to Summer Youth Service Corps projects located in state parks and forests.

During the 1988 summer program the average cost for each SYETP participant was approximately $1,000. The cost per participant in the service corps program will be approximately $500 more, due to the costs of the "wilderness challenge" experience and paying a supervisor for each work crew. To help reduce the extraordinary costs that the full-scale corps model entails, PennSERVE is providing $100 per corpsmember to service delivery areas in order to help subsidize the wilderness challenge component.

Evaluation

The task force will visit a number of sites during the summer to assess the efficacy of the program models and the success of their implementation. Programs will also be monitored as an extension of the regular monitoring of the SYETP done by the Department of Labor and Industry and each service delivery area. Consideration is being given to selecting an independent evaluator to assess the effectiveness of the program.

Each service delivery area participating in the initiative will be asked to submit a report outlining the successes of the program and to identify any problems that hindered the program's effectiveness.

Future Plans

Based on the experience of the summer 1989 program, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania plans to expand upon and continue its efforts to reshape and refocus the SYETP. A follow-up workshop will be planned at the end of calendar year 1989 to begin planning for the summer 1990 program.